An Archaeological Survey of the Dial Tract, Fieldstone Development Bexar County, Texas

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Abstract

An archaeological survey has been carried out at the 84-acre Dial Tract which is slated to be developed by Fieldstone. The research was conducted by Abasolo Archaeological Consultants under contract with Frost Geosciences. The parcel was divided into three "fields" during the survey. Although a few chipped stone artifacts were found, they are not time-diagnostic and represent highly limited prehistoric stone tool processing in the Uvalde Gravels exposed in the fields. No archaeological sites were recorded. Based on this comprehensive survey, it is recommended that no further archaeology is needed at the Dial Tract.

Introduction

Abasolo Archaeological Consultants conducted an archeological survey of the 84 acres in the Dial Tract Fieldstone development adjacent to Eisenhauer Road (Figs. 1, 2). The work was done under contract with Frost Geosciences and at the request of the City of San Antonio The assessment was carried out in accordance with the "Archeological Survey Standards for Texas" in order to evaluate any cultural resources that might be found in terms of their eligibility for nomination to National Register of Historic Places. The assessment consisted of a 100% surface inspection.

The project area lies in the prairies of northeast San Antonio (Fig. 1). The tract has been in cultivation for at least a century, and continued to be until recently (Figs. 3) as evidenced by harvested corn crops. This fertile farm land is now being surrounded by urban expansion of the greater San Antonio area. The property lies near the upper headwaters of Rosillo Creek, between Rosillo Creek and a small western tributary drainage which flows along the west side of the property. Eisenhauer Road borders the property on the south.

Soils in the project area are consistent with those of the Blackland Prairie, an old outwash plain with broad, flat prairie surfaces that parallel streams with riparian vegetation. Soils in the project area are classed as Houston Black clay terrace (0-1 percent slopes) and Houston Black gravely clay (1 to 3 percent slopes), both productive agricultural soils (Taylor et al. 1991). The surface is littered with chert nodules associated with the Pliocene Uvalde Gravel formation (Banks 1990: 56, 57). Byrd (1971: 5) as cited by Banks (1990: 56) describes Uvalde Gravel thusly:

> ...a lag deposit of waterworn siliceous gravels anomalous to the geology of central and south Texas and unrelated to the present river channels and terrace deposits of Pleistocene age...These large accumulations tend to drape over irregularities in the topography and are therefore considered more as a part of the soil than as a mappable geological unit.

Uvalde gravels were an important source for chert and the manufacture of projectile points and many forms of sharp-edge or pointed stone tools in the prehistoric human past. Previous surveys along upper Martinez, Lorence, Rosillo, and Medio creeks have identified large areas of Uvalde Gravel exploitation, especially along and near the drainages (Shafer 2005; Shafer and Hester 2004).

Archaeological Background

Although over 1400 archaeological sites are recorded in Bexar County (data from the Texas Archeological Site Atlas, Texas Historical Commission). These sites reflect at

least 11,200 years of human occupation in the region (see Hester 2004). The earliest, known as **Paleoindian**, began in the last part of the Pleistocene and ended around 8800 years ago as the area transitioned into environments similar to the present day. A long era of hunting and gathering by groups of ancient Native Americans is termed the **Archaic**, from 8800-1500 years ago. Abundant evidence of such occupations, especially campsites with cooking hearths and spear points, knives, and choppers of chipped flint have been recorded in large numbers. Changes in the archaeological record are observed around 1500 years ago (**Late Prehistoric**), with the appearance of the bow and arrow, a shift to bison-hunting, and a new suite of artifact types, including arrow points, specialized knives and scrapers, and pottery. In the late 1600s and early 1700s, many of the local Native American peoples were subsequently incorporated into the Spanish mission populations in San Antonio. This **Historic** period was marked, in the early and mid 18th century, by the incursion of Lipan Apache and Comanche groups. However, the most distinctive aspect of the Historic period are the many structures linked to the Spanish Colonial era of San Antonio, and the many notable buildings from later times, from the early 1800s through the early 1900s.

The long culture history of the San Antonio area remains poorly known, however, in the area to the east/northeast of Interstate 35 where there has been very little archaeological research. Indeed, in the general Dial Tract vicinity, there are no previously documented sites, historic structures, or other cultural resources of significance. Given the presence of a small tributary of upper Rosillo Creek bordering the project to the west, and Rosillo Creek only a few hundred meters to the south of the survey area, the Martinez Creek system to the east, traces of prehistoric human activity were expected to be present. Many sites may have already been eliminated by housing developments. However, the sites may be difficult to recognize, as they were likely very ephemeral in nature, representing brief use of upland areas for specialized plant collecting and hunting. Shafer (2005) and Shafer and Hester (2004) have recorded such a pattern to the east and south in the Martinez Creek system.

Survey Results

The property was divided into three fields numbered 1-3 for recording purposes (Fig. 1). Field 1 bordered a small tributary of Rosillo Creek on the west. Uvalde Gravels were relatively dense along the western portion of the field. Most of the artifacts observed were in this section and included crude, early stage bifaces and flake cores.

Field 2 was the mid-field. A nursing home covers part of the southern section of the field. Uvalde Gravels were relatively sparse across much of the field except for a along a slight knoll at the southern end adjacent to the nursing home property. A single flake core was noted southeast of the nursing home and a crude, early stage biface was noted to the east of the nursing home property.

Field 3 was the eastern most field, and Uvalde Gravels were very thin across this field. No artifacts were observed in Field 3.

Summary

The pedestrian survey of the Dial Tract yielded scant evidence of prehistoric human activity. The only evidence seen was the intermittent exploitation, in prehistoric times, of the exposed Uvalde Gravels, especially along the western section of the property in the areas designated as Field 1 that borders a small tributary of Rosillo Creek. Here the terrain slopes slightly to the west and the erosion has concentrated the Uvalde Gravels, providing a rich source of material for prehistoric flint workers. A small number of cores (less than six), four early stage bifaces (Fig 4), and an occasional primary flake, all reduced using hard hammers, were the only artifacts observed in Field 1 Even fewer artifacts were observed in Field 2 and none in Field 3 as the distance from the little drainage increased. No concentrated quarry or habitation deposits were present within the survey area. Therefore, no further archaeological work is recommended.

It is appropriate to offer this observation and explanation regarding archaeology in the Blackland Prairie. The prairie is an ancient outwash plain as noted earlier that is relatively flat between drainages. Certain soils are heavily admixed with Uvalde Gravels, especially along the more eroded slopes. Originally the Blackland Prairie was dominated by tall native grasses bordered by riparian forests along the streams. These riparian forests afforded habitat and cover for small and medium size game, and provided a corridor for both game and hunter-gatherers. Hunter-gatherers passing along these corridors would often need to replenish their stone tool inventories, and the Uvalde Gravels along the prairie slopes and terraces provided the resources. Therefore, some limited exploitation can be expected along all streams and terraces whose soils include Uvalde Gravels. The density of lithic resource exploitation will be commensurate with the availability of seasonal or permanent water, which dictated the frequency of prehistoric camping and landscape use. Any drainage, whether large or small, will most likely yield some evidence of prehistoric use. Most obvious will be evidence of intermittent or expedient raw material exploitation as observed in the Dial Tract, but discarded or lost tools may also be present as we noted in the Ray Bon Tract (Shafer and Hester 2005).

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Figures

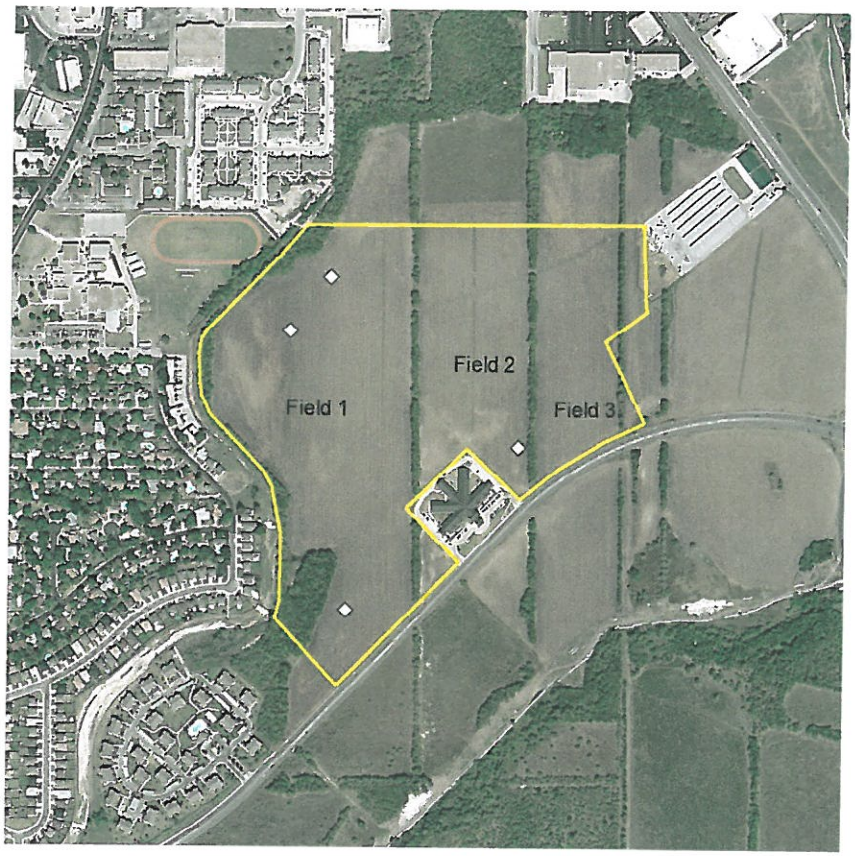

Figure 1. Aerial view of the Dial Tract showing the designated fields and relative location of the Stage 1 bifaces. Base imaged provided by Frost GeoSciences.

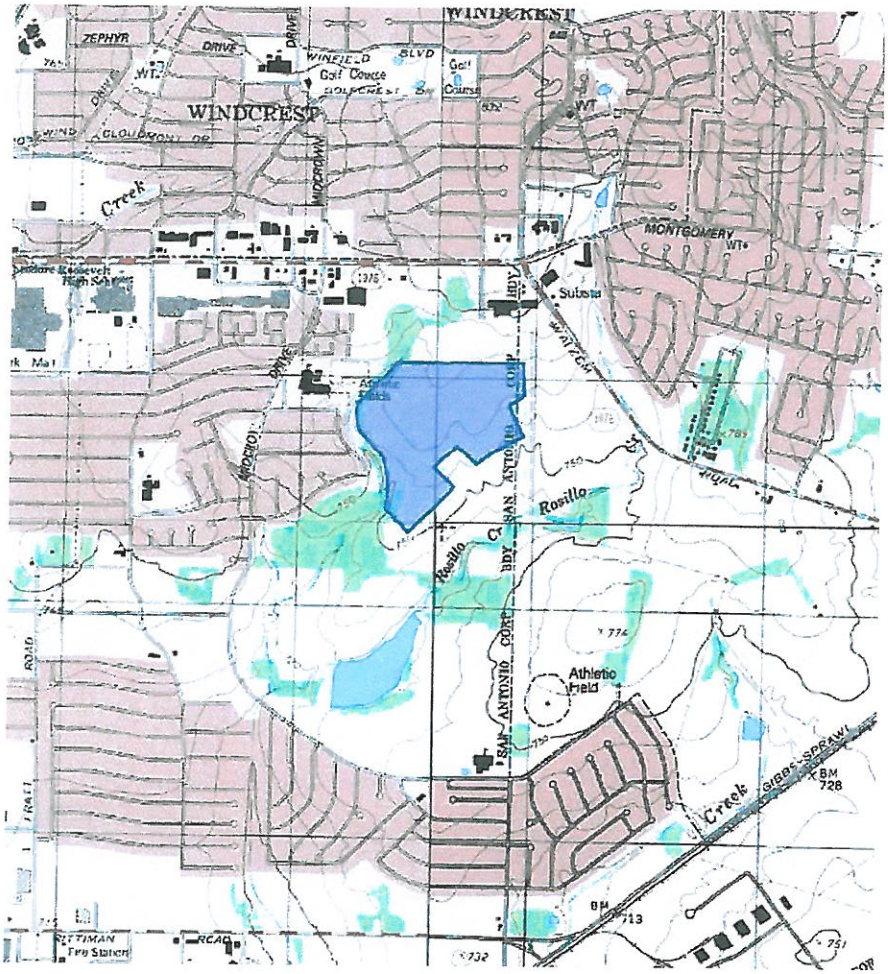

Figure 2. Topographic map of the Dial Tract and vicinity. Image provided by Frost GeoSciences.

Figure 3. Views of project area. Top: Field 1, Bottom: Field 2.

Figure 4. Artifacts observed in the Dial Tract: Top row: Cores; Bottom row: Early stage bifaces.